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Society for
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TESTIMONY OF THE GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
BEFORE THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
IN OPPOSITION TO NYU 2031 PLAN

April 25, 2012

My name is Andrew Berman and I am the Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. GVSHP is the largest membership organization in Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo, and we urge the Commission, in the strongest of terms, to reject NYU's 2031 application.

The 2031 plan is simply wrong for the Village, wrong for New York City, and wrong for NYU. NYU claims they have met and listened to their neighbors for the last four years; in reality, they have ignored our input and forged a plan which violates all our fundamental concerns. NYU claims they are looking at the entire city for their growth, but in reality they are continuing to dramatically expand their Village presence, with developments at other locations doing nothing to relieve that pressure.

Our single overriding concern with the NYU plan is that it allows the university to increasingly dominate our neighborhood. As has happened over the last several decades, more and more of the Village and surrounding neighborhoods will feel populated, controlled, and overwhelmed by a single institution. Even if you think NYU is a great institution, this is not a good future for our neighborhood. The Village has always been about the convergence of a diversity of people, activities, and cultures. To approve this plan and allow NYU to take over more of the neighborhood is to doom the Village to become a company town.

There are better alternatives, which have been successfully pursued across the country. Harvard, Yale, Brown, and a host of other schools have worked with their cities to develop satellite campuses in locations where large-scale development was needed and seen as a benefit, while preventing the oversaturation and overdevelopment of predominantly residential neighborhoods in which the institutions were located. If NYU can open new campuses in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai, why can't they locate some of their new facilities a few subway stops away in the Financial District, Downtown Brooklyn, or Long Island City?

By contrast, NYU's plans would turn a residential neighborhood into a twenty-year construction zone and destroy precious open space. Worse, this proposal only satisfies NYU's stated growth needs for nineteen years. What happens in 2031? Approve this plan, and NYU will be back to ask to take more open space, tear down more low-rise buildings, violate more zoning and urban renewal agreements, and further oversaturate this neighborhood. The 2031 plan is not sustainable for the Village or for NYU. Instead, NYU should be working with the city to find locations that

can absorb its growth not just for the next nineteen years, but the next hundred. The Village cannot without ceasing to be the Village.

Along with my testimony, I am submitting a petition with nearly 3,000 signatures urging you to vote 'NO' on the NYU plan. Subsequent GVSHP speakers will address several reports we have written or commissioned and submitted to CPC analyzing the economic impact of the proposed NYU plan, examining how other schools have handled their expansion, and showing how NYU has consistently eliminated faculty housing on the superblocks, even as they now ask you to lift zoning restrictions to allow them to build more. I am happy to answer any questions about these.

Finally, I ask that you please show New Yorkers that this is not a predetermined process, that you are listening to these arguments and that you are in fact planning for the future of New York City. If that is the case, I believe that you will and must vote 'NO' on the NYU plan.

GVSHP has submitted:

- An analysis by Gambit Consulting of the relative economic and environmental impacts of NYU's proposed expansion and locating their expansion in the Financial District, Downtown Brooklyn, or Long Island City -- <http://gvshp.org/nyugambitstudy>
- A study of how other schools and cities have established satellite campuses to accommodate university growth -- <http://gvshp.org/satellitecampus>
- A study showing how most schools spread their facilities over distances much greater than the 10-15 minute walk NYU claims must be the distance between all its facilities, which is the basis for its claim that it must build at its proposed Village location -- <http://gvshp.org/campuscomparisons>
- A study documenting how NYU has eliminated hundreds of faculty housing units over the years even as it is now asking for approvals to build more faculty housing, claiming they lack sufficient numbers of units -- <http://gvshp.org/wsvaptcombos>

My name is Sheryl Woodruff and I am testifying on behalf of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation in opposition to the NYU 2031 plan. GVSHP has submitted to the City Planning Commission a study we commissioned conducted by Gambit Consulting, analyzing the relative economic, environmental, and quality of life impacts of the proposed NYU 2031 Village expansion plan, and comparing it to the impacts if the university were to locate these facilities in one of several alternative locations such as the Financial District, Downtown Brooklyn, or Long Island City. These alternatives were studied because all are areas the City has identified as priorities for large-scale growth and new development, including the type of facilities NYU would provide; all have ample mass transit to connect it to NYU's other campuses and other parts of the city; and all contain resources making them particularly suited to NYU's academic mission – the Financial District is a global business center, Downtown Brooklyn is part of a burgeoning tech triangle, and Long Island City is home to a number of cultural institutions and film-related facilities.

The Gambit Study found that the positive economic impacts of the proposed NYU expansion would be citywide or regional in scope, and thus New York City would benefit just as much no matter where in the city NYU's facilities are located. But the study finds the Village would derive relatively little benefit from

it being located there and would suffer considerable negative impacts, whereas other locations would derive significantly greater benefits from the proposed expansion and would likely suffer fewer if any negative impacts. NYU's Village plan would be particularly environmentally inefficient because of the below-ground construction. NYU development at other locations by contrast could be much greener and less negatively impactful, and alternate locations would also allow NYU considerably greater opportunity for future growth and expansion.

The Gambit Study pointed out that NYU's proposed project would expand an already dominant presence, rather than introduce a wholly new use, in the Village; many of the students, faculty and service workers who would live, study, and work in the project's buildings would be present as economic actors in the neighborhood, whether or not the project is developed. On the other hand, developing the same amount of academic space and housing at a satellite campus in another neighborhood, where such a population would introduce a new local dynamic, would have a greater economic impact than incremental expansion in the Village. For instance, the study found that the maximum projected increase in local retail spending in the Village associated with the development would be just 2.5%, since retail sales within just a quarter-mile of the site are \$854 million per year, and the additional \$23 million per year in projected retail spending from the development would represent only a roughly 2.5% increase in the size of the local retail market. By contrast, the development would lead to a 10% increase in retail spending in Downtown Brooklyn.

My name is Drew Durniak and I am testifying on behalf of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation in opposition to the NYU 2031 plan. GVSHP's study by Gambit Consulting analyzing the impact of the proposed NYU Village expansion plan found it would be particularly harmful in its impact upon the environment.

For instance, it found that NYU's proposed developments would produce a greater carbon footprint per square foot than the retrofitted but eight-decade-old Empire State Building. The complex conditions of the Village sites on which NYU proposes to build, with existing buildings interspersed throughout the area, do not lend themselves to green development. The space constraints and existing uses of the site require that various uses be shifted several times over the course of the twenty-year construction period, leading to a more complex and material-intensive project. Developing this project in a location that is better able to accommodate the construction staging and allow for a more linear construction plan could eliminate some of the waste associated with the complex plan for the project area. In addition, if NYU moved some of its proposed development program to existing buildings in some other area of the city, the embodied energy of the existing buildings would be preserved, resulting in less construction waste and fewer construction materials being used. The large amount of underground development is particularly resource intensive and would result in permanently higher operation costs for that space. If the project were developed elsewhere, there would potentially be greater opportunity to include natural light, green space, and other elements typically encouraged for a LEED development.

Additionally, the study warned of the grave potential negative impacts inherent in the choice of this location if the expansion plan has to be halted mid-stream due to financial shortfalls or for any other reason. NYU has one of the smallest financial endowments of any comparable educational institution in the country, and in the last economic downturn, considerably wealthier institutions, including Harvard,

had to halt similar plans. Given the project site's location, directly beneath residential buildings housing thousands of people, including hundreds of NYU faculty, any construction interruptions would be especially impactful upon the quality of life of the neighborhood, and would substantially reduce economic benefits. On a less complex site, without existing uses, potential impacts would be less problematic.

The study also identified the marked loss in open space resulting from NYU's plan --from 6.23 acres currently to 3.71 acres, a net loss of 2.52 acres, in what is the community district with the second lowest ratio of open space per resident in the city. NYU's claim that it would increase the amount of public open space is based upon an overly restrictive and technical definition of open space which would exclude much of Riverside and Central Parks, including the Great Lawn. NYU's calculations of "open space" leaves out much of the true open space on these sites, and entirely excludes the Coles Gymnasium, which was only allowed to be built because it was supposed to provide substantial equivalent open space for the public in the form of access to its roof and athletic facilities. The little remaining open space in NYU's plan would frequently be encased in shadows cast by NYU's massive proposed new buildings.

Additionally, the proposed design would harm or destroy historically significant features of Washington Square Village and University Village by roughly doubling the amount of built space on both superblocks. The requested rezoning would permit the construction of new towers on areas intended by design and required by the current zoning to remain as open space or low-rise buildings.

My name is Andito Lloyd and I am testifying on behalf of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation in opposition to the NYU 2031 plan.

New York University is seeking to overturn long-standing neighborhood zoning protections, gut open-space preservation requirements, lift urban renewal deed restrictions, introduce commercial zoning in a residential area, and take over publicly-owned park space in order to facilitate their development of 2.5 million square feet of new facilities – the equivalent of the Empire State Building – in the blocks south of Washington Square Park. The plan has elicited a firestorm of opposition from NYU's neighbors, faculty, and students. But the university claims that such a plan is not only necessary for it to grow, but the only way for it to do so.

However, NYU's situation is hardly unique. Universities in other cities have had to confront the tension between their need or desire to expand and the limitations of the urban environment in which they are located and the desires for the preservation of neighborhood character and quality of life by surrounding communities.

What is different, however, is NYU's approach. Other universities and other cities across the country have handled this challenge very differently, and successfully managed to balance these sometimes competing needs. Instead of seeking to shoehorn more and more facilities into an area with limited capacity to handle that growth, universities and cities have partnered to find nearby locations which can absorb the growth, and where the expansion of a university would be maximally beneficial to the city

and leave room for continued growth of the university.

To illustrate this point, the Commission has received a copy of GVSHP's study called "Too Big to Fit" which looks at Brown University in Providence, RI; Emerson College in Boston, MA; Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, GA; Suffolk University in Boston, MA; Harvard University in Cambridge and Allston, MA; and Columbia University here in New York. Partnering with local elected leaders, the business community and residents, each of these institutions are building satellite campuses or new campuses in areas of their cities that were identified as targets for redevelopment. This is in stark contrast to the approach NYU is advocating of continuing to chip away at and overwhelm an existing, vital and historic residential neighborhood.

These cases studies amply illustrate that there are very different and successful approaches which can be taken. The satellite campus approach could help areas of the city which would greatly benefit from this kind of development. Leaders of Community Boards 1 and 4 in Manhattan and 2 in Brooklyn have spoken out about the positive benefit that greater development by a university like NYU could have in their community, as has Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz. This different approach would also ultimately help NYU; the university is pursuing a uniquely difficult and expensive route for expansion that will leave them with few if any options in less than twenty years when they need to grow further. University and city leaders in so many other cases have seen the benefit of this more far-sighted approach; we hope you will as well, and reject the NYU 2031 plan.

My name is Amanda Davis and I am testifying on behalf of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation in opposition to the NYU 2031 plan.

In advocating for their controversial twenty-year Village Expansion Plan, New York University's administration frequently makes the claim that considering alternative locations like the Financial District are impractical, because they must locate their facilities within a 10-15 minute walk of each other around Washington Square.

But this belies the experience of universities across the country, which maintain their facilities spread out over considerably greater distances than a 10-15 minute walk.

To illustrate this, GVSHP has submitted to the Commission a study called "The Myth of the 10-Minute Walk From Washington Square," which looks at the geographic distribution of the facilities of a variety of U.S. colleges— urban, suburban, and rural; large and small; public and private. We took the outlines of the location of their facilities and overlaid and compared them to NYU's Washington Square "core" and surrounding facilities.

What we found is that most schools maintain campuses and facilities over distances considerably greater than the 10 to 15 minute walk NYU claims it must maintain. In fact, most schools seem to have facilities spread out over distances the equivalent of those between Washington Square and the Financial District, and in many cases over considerably greater distances — even schools without "satellite" campuses. Further, few if any of these campuses have the wealth of mass transit options that allow travel between Washington Square and a location like the Financial District to take as little as 5 to 10 minutes. In fact, most of these other campuses require walking times of much more than 10-15 minute between facilities, as NYU claims is essential.

While the study compares NYU's geographic distribution of facilities to a broad range of schools, I have with me today a representative cross sample – University of Wisconsin/Madison, a public institution with about as many undergraduates as NYU; Stanford University, a private institution which NYU considers a peer with less than half the number of undergraduates as NYU; and Middlebury College in Vermont, a small liberal arts college in Vermont with 2,500 undergraduates, or just over 1/20th the population of NYU. As you can see, each of these schools, regardless of these various features, spreads their facilities out over considerably greater distances than NYU, or roughly the equivalent of the distance from Washington Square to the Financial District. Apparently these schools have not heard that a college's facilities must all be within a 10 to 15 minute walk of one another, as the NYU administration claims.

Upon even routine examination, the very foundation of NYU's claim for the need for approval of their massive Village expansion plan is faulty. The university is seeking to take public land, overturn zoning rules and open space preservation requirements, undo urban renewal deed restrictions, and violate the terms under which they were originally given public land fifty years ago. With the best of arguments they would be hard-pressed to justify such an outcome. Given the specious basis for their claims, we urge you in the strongest of terms to reject NYU's 2031 application.

My name is Dana Schulz and I am testifying on behalf of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation in opposition to the NYU 2031 plan.

GVSHP has submitted to the Commission for the record a study called "Disappearing Before Our Eyes," which documents how NYU has, over the years, consciously and consistently reduced the number of units of faculty housing in the Washington Square Village complex. This is noteworthy of course because NYU is before you today asking you to overturn zoning rules in order to allow them to build more faculty housing on these exact sites, claiming a shortage of such facilities. What they don't tell you is that they themselves have contributed significantly to this shortage which they are now asking their neighbors and the public to bear the burden for correcting.

According to Department of Buildings records, from 1960 to 2010, NYU has eliminated 175 units of faculty housing from the Washington Square Village complex. This has been done through a continuing series of apartment combinations, turning studio, one, and two bedroom units into increasingly larger "super-apartments," some of which are made of three or four of the original units. The pace has accelerated in recent years, as more than 112 of the units were subsumed to combinations just since 1992.

Beyond this, by all accounts NYU is warehousing, or leaving unoccupied for long periods of time, numerous faculty housing units in the Washington Square Village complex. Residents have reported nearly 65 units in the complex that are empty and have remained empty for protracted periods of time. The combined documented warehoused apartments and those lost to combinations account for about 240 units, or nearly 20% of the units once found in the complex, NYU's primary source of faculty housing. The change is so dramatic that in the 2010 census, the tract containing Washington Square Village had the largest drop in population of any in the Village or East Village, the largest drop in the number of housing units, and the largest increase in the number of unoccupied units.

There are many reasons why the Commission should not approve NYU's plan. But NYU is asking city leaders to undo long-standing agreements with the public, and asking its neighbors to deal with twenty years of construction and a devastating loss of open space and light and air so the university can build, among other things, new faculty housing units. Yet NYU is warehousing and reducing its stock of faculty apartments to create larger, vanity "super-apartments." This is particularly galling and inappropriate, and for these and many other reasons we urge you to reject NYU's 2031 plan.